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A Just, Unnecessary War: The Flawed American Strategy in the Persian Gulf

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Why This Discussion Now?

This essay was first written on the morning of January 15, 1991, it has undergone only minor changes since Why should anyone write another analysis of American policy in the Persian Gulf after all the decisions had been taken, every viewpoint had been aired, Congress had debated and voted, diplomacy had failed, and war was just about to begin? Why, especially a private citizen, with no responsibility for any decision, no particular forum for which to write, and no special audience to address?

Partly as catharsis, an acquittal of conscience, a symbolic gesture But also, and mainly, out of a feeling that not everything had been said and considered, and that what was omitted needed saying, especially during the war One thing largely missing from the debate, was the perspective of history Not, of course, some kinds and pieces of history On the immediate history of this crisis there was plenty, plenty also, probably too much, of historical analogies between Saddam and Hitler, or the present situation and Munich or Vietnam, but very little serious analysis of this crisis in terms of the broad history of international politics in recent decades and centuries In the debate over the immediate question, "What should we do right now?", other questions were drowned out 'Where do we and the world stand now in the light of history, recent and remote? What kind of turning point is this? What are its historic dangers and possibilities? If history is any guide, where will the decisions and actions we take now be likely to lead in ten or twenty years time?

These questions are not only of interest to historians of international politics like myself They, and the possible answers to them, are relevant and important even after the decision for war is made and while war is going on For one thing, they concern its conduct and the character of the peace to follow For another (here I express a conviction impossible to demonstrate to skeptics, but one which long study of the history of international politics impresses on me), its history is not simply one of constant struggle for power and advantage, punctuated by frequent wars Along with that, it is also a record of a long, painful, costly, and uneven process of learning—learning how to combine peace with reasonable security and some measure of justice, how to conceive of a viable international system, how to define and build a tolerable world order Whatever the root causes of war may be, one major problem of dealing with war is clearly one of know-how how to manage international politics under the structural conditions of the existence of many actors with conflicting, sometimes incompatible, purposes, rights, claims, and needs Constructing a viable international system is extremely difficult work, the hardest political task the nations of the world face Each generation faces it anew, with some accumulated wisdom and technique, and even more

accumulated ignorance and prejudice, and must somehow build on the one and overcome the other The learning process always works imperfectly, and sometimes breaks down disastrously, but it must and does go on

This essay has a purpose, therefore, even though it can make no difference in immediate events If the conduct of international politics finally involves collective learning, then someone who has reason to believe that he or she sees where a wrong turn is being taken has a kind of duty to say so If that person is wrong, no great harm will be done except to his/her reputation, and if right, it will contribute to the learning process

Where History has Brought Us

There are three great changes in international politics, the culminations of decades or centuries of development, that one can detect ripening in our age [1] The first is the rise of the trading state [2] This means not merely the increasing preeminence of economic factors in international politics, but the fact that the long-term existence and success of states comes to depend more and more upon their efficiency in promoting commerce rather than their prowess and success in waging war In the 17th and 18th centuries, especially in Europe where our current international system originated, states were literally made by and for war Only by acquiring the permanent means for war, above all reliable revenues and a strong standing army or navy or both, could a state hope to survive and prosper, and the best way to acquire revenues and develop a military establishment was to wage war successfully In the late 20th century, states are increasingly made by and for trade Without abandoning their power and security functions, they depend increasingly upon the promotion and protection of commerce for their internal stability and external influence Many examples could be cited—as successes, Japan, West Germany, Western Europe, many newly industrializing countries, as relative failures, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Vietnam, and others

The second is closely connected the decline in the utility of military victory One might suppose that war has always been a bloody, costly, senseless business In a moral or religious sense, no doubt, but not in a supposedly "realistic' power-political one Until recent times, in European history till approximately the end of the 19th century, successful war usually paid off The winner could turn a handsome profit, not merely in honor, prestige, and territory, but often in terms of hard cash Many examples could be cited, the most recent in European history being the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, though some colonial wars were highly profitable well after that More than that, military victory in war could usually be thought of as genuinely solving problems, or at least solving them as much as international politics allowed a solution at all The only remedy available for

countering aggression, gaining security, fulfilling vital interests, or achieving national self-determination was a successful war

In our time, as a consequence of many familiar developments (the exponential development of the costs and destructiveness of warfare, the increasing complexity and fragility of modern economic activity, the politization of the masses everywhere, the organization of the whole world into nominally independent states, the speed and pervasiveness of modern communications), war and military victory can no longer, in most cases, be seen as profitable, or, in themselves, an answer to problems This does not mean, of course, that military power and its use in war have become useless and absurd, an obsolete relic in history [3] Military power is still indispensable in international politics and inseparable from it, wars may still be necessary and justified, and military victory may still be required as a foundation for solving a critical problem Military victory was necessary to end both World Wars and try to solve the problems that had caused them But military victory in itself did not pay off and did not solve those underlying problems—the history of both postwar eras testifies to that—and often, military victory can weaken the victor and make the underlying problems worse (witness Britain and France in the aftermath of World War I)

The third change is harder to define and demonstrate, yet important and closely connected with the first two It is the rise in integration and community and the increasing reliance on consensus and law in international politics Along with the rise of the trading state and the decline of the utility of military victory, has gone a growing awareness that many major international problems cannot even be approached save on a broad international, even global level We have become increasingly aware that individual states, regardless of their power, cannot solve these alone—the environment, the law of the sea, international trade, famine and underdevelopment, and most of the really critical problems of peacekeeping, including those of the Middle East The world has grown and is growing together in other ways the pervasive penetration of modern communications, the dominance of capitalism, the increasing acceptance of democratic elections as a form of political legitimation for governments We see evidence for this trend in the integration of Western Europe, the eagerness of Eastern Europe to join it, the increasing usefulness of the United Nations and its agencies, and the proliferation of transnational actors in international politics

These three changes are, in the main, very positive They represent our best chance, not merely of survival in the nuclear age, but of a more stable, peaceful, and just international order

Where Do We Stand Now?

Perhaps the question should be, where does all this get us? What do these assertions, some of them commonplace, some subject to serious challenge, have to do with the crisis and war in the Persian Gulf?

Quite a bit, actually Saddam Hussein represents, as clearly as any leader can, a defiant challenge to all these changes We should not demonize him He is only a particularly nasty specimen of the kind of power politician common in European politics of previous centuries and far from unknown in our own [4] What needs emphasis is not his ambition, lack of scruples, and reliance on force, these are obvious It is the fact that in his way he relies on these changes in international politics, uses them for his own purposes Like many power politicians, he despises others' scruples and inhibitions as weakness and exploits them as his opportunity The fact that other states and peoples, especially in the West, increasingly rely on the undisturbed course of world commerce, no longer desire or believe in military solutions, and want to act in community and by consensus, is what originally made him think he could get away with his seizure of Kuwait, just as he earlier expected to take advantage of Iran s revolutionary chaos to get away with his aggression there

Therefore, Saddam needs to be stopped and eventually evicted from Kuwait and made less dangerous Even more is at stake here than those who have advocated the use of force against him usually recognize We need to worry not only about his dangerous example of successful aggression, his potential leadership in a critically unstable region with vital oil supplies and strategic waterways, and his likely development over time of nuclear, bacteriological, and chemical weapons We also should be concerned about the continuation rather than the reversal, of the favorable developments of recent decades in international politics

If, then, the common argument were true, that the only choices in our dealings with Saddam were negotiation or force, one would have reluctantly to accept the necessity of force One would also have to face its costs squarely not only an uncertain but perhaps high price in lives, destruction, and economic and political chaos, but also a threat to the still shaky fabric of an emerging, better and more peaceful world order Like it or not, we necessarily run the risk in making war on Iraq of destroying the new emerging international system in order to save it

Was that our only choice—to let Saddam undermine these hopeful advances, or to risk ruining them ourselves, and being unwillingly dragged down closer to his level, by resorting to a military solution? Or was there another way to ruin Saddam, or let him ruin himself?

What We Could Have Done

The question is this Did the very changes in international politics already mentioned—the preeminence of economics, the non-utility of military victory, and the increased importance of international integration, shared values and notions of political legitimacy, and law—offer us a way simultaneously to defeat Saddam and to demonstrate the effectiveness of these principles in action? I think so In fact, we started out doing it, and the great tragedy, as so often happens in history, is that our very success in doing one thing caused us to overreach, trying for something different, allegedly better but really not as good

First, some comments on two ideas or slogans constantly used in this crisis victory, and the use of force By any sane definition, "victory" in international politics means not the destruction of the opponent's capacity to resist, but the achievement of one's own purposes, sensibly conceived, at a minimal cost to oneself, the general environment, the world, and even one s opponent It was said in the 18th century that the goal of international politics was to do as much good as possible to one s neighbor in time of peace and as little harm as necessary in time of war Of course, this idealistic conception was seldom, if ever, followed in practice, but now it has become a practical requirement for survival in our tight little nuclear world

Even by such a definition, victory over Saddam would require some use of force The claim that negotiations failed and alone were bound to fail is correct But a great deal depends on how one conceives of the use of force in international politics The administration has seemed fixed for some time on a concept of direct confrontation, force against force The picture evoked by President Bush s language (a line drawn in the desert) is that of a gunfight in the American West The whole procedure followed since November—massive reinforcements, warnings, and an ultimatum followed by the overwhelming application of force—confirms this image

There is a better model for the use of force where it is necessary in international politics judo In judo, the goal is not to exert the maximum force possible directly against the opponent, but to let his own use of force throw him off balance, and then to add just enough force of one's own to bring him down and disarm him

No one has ever presented his opponents with a better opportunity for the successful use of political judo than Saddam did last August 2 He invaded Kuwait and met a world reaction for which he was wholly unprepared I do not suppose for a moment that the United States government lured him into a trap by having its ambassador express its disinterest in his dispute with Kuwait, but had we wanted to lure him into one, we could not have done it better Everything he did thereafter was

clearly improvised, an attempt to find some way to extricate himself with a victory, or at least without a defeat fatal to a dictator like himself

That scramble could have told us something Our goal from the beginning, at least our immediate one, should not have been to force Saddam out of Kuwait, but to pin him down there and make him stay, and by staying in Kuwait, gradually to undermine his armed forces, his economy, his position in the Middle East and the Arab world, and ultimately his rule Saddam's aggression presented us with a great opportunity to prove the preeminence of economics, the uselessness of military victory, and the effectiveness of world consensus and international law, in the process of ruining him

This was not simply a possible opening for American policy, it seemed for a short while to be the actual policy, and one pursued with skill and success Leave aside the very interesting but essentially irrelevant question of earlier American policy toward Iraq and Saddam and the extent to which it may have helped build up Saddam as a menace and contributed to the crisis The main point is, as even George Bush's critics admit, that everything he did for the first two months was sensible and effective—putting a defensive force in the Gulf to prevent further Iraqi aggression, mobilizing a remarkable coalition of world opinion behind the American stand against Iraq, helping make the United Nations an effective instrument of sanctions as well as diplomacy, and above all putting together by far, the most airtight and powerful system of economic sanctions the world has ever seen

At that point Saddam was not merely stopped but trapped There was nothing he could do Everything he attempted did him no good or made his situation worse—peace with Iran at the sacrifice of the meager gains of eight years of war, futile appeals to other Arabs, self-defeating propaganda, empty threats and demonstrations, even more self-defeating seizures of hostages, followed by their piecemeal release in a manner that gained Iraq nothing and made Saddam look ridiculous

By the same token, the United States and its allies need have done nothing more against Saddam We could have said with good conscience that much as we sympathized with the Kuwaiti regime and its people and condemned what Iraq had done and was doing, once the crime was done we could not liberate Kuwait except at a cost in death and destruction far greater than the suffering Kuwait had already endured Our goal was therefore, to insure that Iraq would not profit from its aggression 's oil, import weapons and supplies, or do any of the things a would-be modern economy and military machine in a developing country must do to keep going The first objective of the United Nations, we could have said, was not to force Iraq out of Kuwait, whether by force, negotiations, or sanctions The first objective was to uphold the new emerging standards of international politics by

exacting a suitable cost for aggression from a naked aggressor, proving to Iraq that so long as it clung to stolen goods, it could not sell either those goods or its own or buy anyone else's What Iraq chose to do about this situation was for Iraq itself to decide If it wished the sanctions to stop, Iraq itself would have to change the mind of the world community, convince it that Iraq deserved to come back into that community and share in its trade The first condition of that readmission, of course, would be that Iraq evacuate Kuwait

This would have been diplomatic and military judo Militarily, by mobilizing a small fraction of our forces, we would have pinned down the greater part of Saddam s, and robbed him of all the sources of modern technology and weapons while we and our allies continued to develop our own Fiscally, a minor expenditure of our own collective resources would have forced the Iraqi constantly to drain theirs, economically, the rest of the world would have had, as it has now, plenty of oil without Iraq's, and Iraq would have no revenues without the trade of the rest of the world Politically, we would not have placed ourselves in the position of having to force Saddam to retreat, thereby risking making him a hero to much of the Arab world because he had the courage to defy us We would have put him instead into the position, humiliating and dangerous to a military dictator, of having blundered into a trap and not knowing how to get out

Why This Would Have Worked Better than War

The first reason is that it would have been cheaper, simpler, more economical in resources, and more calculable War not only brings bloodshed, destruction, and waste, but incalculable side effects No one can tell, of course, what Saddam might have done in response to such a strategy, but we would have known what we and our allies had to do—essentially, maintain our position and wait—and we would have known that whatever violent act he might try in reply would not help him Of course it would have taken time for the effects of this economic blockade to cripple Iraq—perhaps a year, perhaps longer But the longer it took, the more compelling the lesson would be

Second, Saddam would, in the end, be driven out and quite possibly overthrown, not through force applied by a superpower, making him a hero to resentful Arabs for generations to come (which by many accounts is precisely what he wants and what may well be happening in the Arab world), but by his own doing The worst thing that could happen to him was that he be made to appear a fool before his own people This strategy would also have had the best chance of achieving his overthrow by the Iraqi themselves Economies cannot survive forever without key imports, war, even cold war, cannot be waged indefinitely without revenues, modern armies and air forces cannot sustain themselves without new weapons and parts It is notorious

that Iraq's power was built up by first-world arms and technology, including some from the United States This would cut it off An army is more likely to follow its leader and fight in a lost cause than to let itself die on the vine in a futile one

Third, this would achieve exactly what we want for the international system—demonstrate the preeminence of economics, the futility of Saddam s military victory, the effectiveness of international consensus and law

Finally, this would have left the political initiative and freedom of maneuver in the hands of the United States and its allies, while robbing Saddam of it Any political or military response of his could have been met with further judo tactics on our part Take, for example, the most effective political argument he has had his claim to want justice for the Palestinians, and offers to evacuate Kuwait in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories or an international conference on the Palestinian question Our answer to this transparently hypocritical ploy has been a justified but clumsy and rigid rejection of linkage and insistence on unconditional withdrawal This has given Saddam a propaganda advantage in regard to questions where, as we must recognize, world opinion is as decisively against us as it is behind us on Kuwait

Diplomatic judo would have avoided this We could have replied to all Saddam s offers of a withdrawal from Kuwait, on his conditions, by repeating that our objective was not to persuade Saddam to leave Kuwait, but to establish that his aggression was unprofitable Any bribe or payment of any kind to Iraq for leaving Kuwait was therefore unacceptable, incompatible with the objective of the United Nations As for a conference on the Palestinian problem, we could have replied that we had long favored this in principle and under the right circumstances, and were willing to try to persuade the various parties, including Israel, to agree to one, though we could not force it on them Iraq's actions, however, had made one thing crystal clear so long as Saddam ruled Iraq, Iraq could not be permitted into any Middle Eastern conference, on the Palestinian question or any other Not only had he spawned the current threat of war by another aggression and added more atrocities to his earlier ones, but also during this crisis he had repeatedly and solemnly promised, if war broke out, to attack Israel, a bystander in this quarrel Such a deliberate profession of terrorism, such a total disregard of international law and humane standards of conduct, must disqualify Saddam himself, and Iraq, so long as he ruled it, from any peace conference anywhere A stand of this sort, pledging American support, in principle, for a conference on the Palestinian question, on the strict condition that Saddam Hussein and Iraq be excluded, would have turned Saddam's ploy to our advantage, isolating him further and making Palestinians and other Arabs see (insofar as they are accessible to evidence) that he could only hurt the Palestinian cause and damage those who associated with him

Why (Supposedly) This Could Not Have Worked

Advocates of the use of force against Saddam naturally reject all this as wishful thinking The objections are worth considering, but when one does, the case for judo rather than a gunfight, sanctions as positively better and more effective than military force, only gets stronger

1 Sanctions did not work, they did not materially weaken Iraq s war-making capacity in five months, and could not have been expected to force Iraq out of Kuwait within any acceptable time frame Reply of course they did not achieve the final desired effect in five months, and could not be expected to This is like saying that a siege failed because the fortress being starved out could still fight after three weeks The aim of this policy would have been to wear Iraq down slowly over time, in that sense, the longer it would have taken, the better it would have worked The object lesson would have been not that sanctions could throw Iraq out of Kuwait, but that sanctions could make the price for staying in Kuwait intolerably high

2 Sanctions and diplomacy would not have changed Saddam's mind, he only understands force Reply True—and this is precisely why repeated threats of force failed to move him, and were bound to There has always been something strange about the administration's insistence that Saddam is a ruthless, power-hungry dictator, and that therefore only the threat of force or force itself could move him Since he is a ruthless power-hungry dictator, he knows that yielding to threats of force, especially from a foe he and his people regard as Satan, would destroy him These threats, followed by the actual use of force, particularly by the United States, have, in a certain sense, played into his hands, enabling him to make innocent people suffer the havoc his crimes have instigated, while preserving his image as a fearless defender of the Arab and Muslim world against the infidel We should never have wanted to change Saddam s mind, we should have wanted to change the mind of the Iraqis and Arabs about Saddam, by showing him up as a fool and a failure, a leader who committed a folly and then made his own people pay for it

3 Sanctions could not have been sustained long enough to do the job, before they could bite, the coalition would have broken up, trade with Iraq would have been renewed, and the West would have suffered an immense political defeat Reply this is constantly asserted, but somewhere those who claim this ought to give some evidence The sanctions remained to the end incomparably the most complete, effective, and universal set ever imposed The only perceptible strains on the coalition (in France, Germany, and some Arab states) emerged at the prospect that the economic sanctions and blockade would be turned into open war Besides, if the United States really had well-grounded fears of defection from the coalition, there were very effective

measures it could have taken to maintain it, without harming or threatening any of our partners It could, for example, have officially declared war on Iraq, announcing at the same time that it would undertake no offensive action unless Iraq did, but merely intended to exercise its belligerent rights on the sea and in the air in order to maintain the blockade imposed by the United Nations more effectively This would put anyone proposing to trade with Iraq on notice that by doing so it might incur the direct enmity of the United States—a sobering prospect

4 The imposition of sanctions always implied the use of force if sanctions did not obtain results quickly If the United States and its allies had in effect backed down by failing to follow them up quickly with force, Saddam would have emerged triumphant from this test of strength between the two sides All the weak and vacillating regimes of the region would have leaned toward him, the coalition and its sanctions would gradually have collapsed, and the whole world would have been increasingly threatened by the leadership of this ruthless, power-hungry dictator over an area critical for the world s economy and political order

Reply This is a strange argument One would have difficulty taking it seriously were it not advanced by serious commentators (e g , Geoffrey Kemp of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) and journals (e g , *The Economist* of London in several issues in December and January 1990-91) What the argument does is to describe fairly accurately the unfortunate results of the massive reinforcement of American forces in the Gulf region since November, and of subsequent American policy down to January 15 These moves transformed the question by making it into a *mano a mano* test of strength between George Bush and Saddam Hussein, so that Bush as well as Saddam came to face unacceptable political losses if he backed down without a clear victory By committing itself to forcing Iraq out of Kuwait within a short period of time, the American government committed a critical blunder, laid a trap for itself and fell into it Sanctions neither implied further force nor required it They implied and required patience, the simple recognition that the longer Iraq stayed in Kuwait, the worse its situation and the better that of the United Nations would be

5 The American public could not have waited long enough for such a policy to work The American forces deployed in the Gulf had to produce results within a fairly short period of time, or public pressure would have demanded that the boys be brought home Besides, an administration that tried to wait Iraq out by sanctions would soon have appeared indecisive and weak at home, like Jimmy Carter's in the Iranian crisis, and like his, would soon have been discredited and swept aside

Reply I suspect, without any sure knowledge or basis for it, that this was an important reason for administration policy since November

Moreover, the political calculation involved could conceivably be correct, i e , it is possible that the American people in this instance would not have been willing to wait for results, but would have demanded that its government either go in and get the job done quickly, or pull out If one accepts that this calculation was a major reason for the current policy, and that it was backed by the best evidence available, then one has to say that this argument, as a justification of the administration's policy, is at once unworthy and unanswerable Unworthy in that the impatience and ignorance of the American public, and the unwillingness of national leaders to guide and educate it, constitute no defensible ground for engaging in war ourselves, much less pulling others into it with us, unanswerable in that one cannot expect politicians to jump over their own shadow, to risk political suicide (To be sure, one might wish for a willingness, over a great national and world issue, at least to risk losing the next election)

But more must be said If this was a real factor behind American policy, even if only one among several, we need to face squarely what this means It means first that as a nation we are unfit for world leadership No people so immature, and no political leaders so incapable of educating or leading it, can be entrusted with the position and power the United States now enjoys Second, we ought to understand what we are really saying when we give such a reason or excuse for American policy We say something like this "It is true that the United States is following a stupid and counterproductive policy, but you must understand the reason for this The reason, in the final analysis, is that we really *are* stupid and unreliable, and we don t want to learn or change "

I do not believe this Without holding a sanguine view of the American public's political sophistication, I think that the forty-five years of America's presence in Europe, forty in Korea, thirty or more in support of Israel, demonstrate the public's ability, sensibly led and instructed, to understand the central realities of international politics, gird itself for the long term, and wait patiently for results

The Uses of Disenchanted Loyalty

Is this not all water under the bridge? Is it not time to close ranks behind the President and our armed forces after a policy has been decided by the democratic process and we have fully exercised our constitutional liberties to protest and to try to influence the decision? Must not this kind of argument sow disunity and discouragement, make the situation worse?

First, an observation that while this argument has been made during many wars, I can think of none where it was good advice in the long run The best statesmen and citizens during a number of wars—World War I, the Crimean War, the War of 1812, most of the Napoleonic wars, and more—

seem to me to have been those in various countries who were ready to say, "We may have made a mistake in getting into this war, and even if we must fight it now, we must think of how to limit and repair the damage'

True, recognizing the mistake does not enable one to undo it The citizen who believes neither, with some, that this war is just and necessary, nor, with others, that it is unnecessary, unjust, and imperialist, is in an awkward position He may regard it, as I do, as something common enough in history—a war more or less justified but unnecessary [5] One who sees his country stumble into such a war is not allowed even the psychic satisfaction of blaming it on particular villains in the White House, the Pentagon, Wall Street, or wherever, and believing that things would be better if these scoundrels were thrown out Nor is there comfort in the reflection that the bad consequences of a just, unnecessary war, even a victorious one, will be the same as if it were unjust, merely because it was unnecessary It is a sound maxim in international politics, above all in war, that nothing is more expensive than what is superfluous

Yet I remain convinced that there is a special value to a disenchanted loyalty, a disillusioned patriotism, precisely in times like this First of all, it should heighten the willingness and capacity of citizens to learn from the war, to figure out how to be smarter at international politics from here on Neither a jingoistic celebration of American power, nor a denunciation of American arrogance and war crimes are any good for that Second, and even more important, a disenchanted patriotism should help Americans do what is always most important with any war, which is not to celebrate its victory or denounce its stupidity and brutality or even learn how to avoid the next one, but to see as clearly as we can, the real consequences of this one and try to deal seriously with them

Whether the war is brief and glorious or prolonged and grinding, two things can be assumed the United States and its allies will win the war, which is far better than losing or allowing Saddam to win, and it will cause collateral damage, both economic and political, in the Middle East and elsewhere No one can predict what the consequences will be, but they may include the discovery that we, as well as Saddam, have a price to pay for ignoring some of the new realities of international politics

This country is likely to learn anew the long-term preeminence of economics over politics We already owe a high bill for having pursued power politics while largely ignoring our mounting deficits, failing educational systems, lagging competitiveness, and crumbling infrastructure A war in which we have continued that pursuit while others have continued to attend to trade will make that bill higher still

We will further discover, in various ways, the declining utility, even the disutility, of military victory as a real solution to long-range problems

We are likely to experience what the leaders of successful military coalitions often do that those who have been rescued prove notably ungrateful, and those who have helped in the coalition expect the hegemonic leader to pay them for their services in various kinds of coin A heavy bill for Israel's restraint has already been presented, and more will be coming It is impossible to see how the war can make the central problem of the region, the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict, any more soluble on terms the United States could endorse It has deepened the chasm between Palestinians and Israeli, discouraged if not destroyed any inclination by even moderate Israel to trade land for peace, and discredited Yasir Arafat and the PLO as spokesmen for the Palestinians without raising any substitute in their place The entry into the Israeli cabinet during the war of the small Moledet party, whose only platform is the expulsion of Arabs from the occupied territories, is an ominous sign At the same time the war has raised popular Arab passions on the issue to new heights, imperilled moderate Arab governments, and focussed Arab hatreds and frustrations more directly on the United States instead of Israel, further weakening and discrediting our government as the leader in a negotiated peace We may remember the war as the triumph of American and United Nations arms over despotism and aggression Most Arabs will remember it as one in which the superpower and its powerful allies destroyed a small Arab country and people trying to stand up for Arab rights, and many others may come to share that view more than ours We deal here not with questions of right or wrong, but the fact of selective perception

Finally, we may come to see more clearly our own need, as well as the world s, for international consensus and cooperation in meeting common problems The original coalition in favor of economic sanctions was a remarkable example of how cooperation can be based on an agreement on a common goal and a common legitimation for action It has thus far held up well, even in war, because a consensus on the use of force was obtained in advance and its limited goal, the liberation of Kuwait, so far, observed in practice But no such consensus exists for what to do after that goal is achieved, and that is when the need for it will be painfully apparent Opponents of the war sometimes claim that in Panama the United States committed an aggression as bad as Saddam's seizure of Kuwait or worse This is a good example of the equation of unequals, and of missing the point The lesson of Panama is not the evil of American imperialism, but the non-utility of military victory as a solution to political and economic chaos and upheaval, and the need for a wide consensus among all the main participants in a military-political action as to what the final outcome should be More than a year after American forces easily occupied a small nearby country with which the United States had long had close ties and was familiar, most of whose citizens welcomed the Americans as liberators, the United States still has not been able to erect a stable regime and pull out This was because there was no agreement between us and the Panamanians, other Central

Americans, or anyone else on the actual goal and outcome of intervention Iraq and the Middle East will be much worse Not only will we find it vastly more difficult to forge a coalition and create a consensus for peace than we have for war we will also find even close allies questioning why we are so selective in our use of force to punish aggression and end illegal occupations, and wondering how often we propose to draw the sword to save peace and build a new international order

This is in no way an argument for neo-isolationism, neither is it Monday-morning quarterbacking or blaming America first It simply urges that Americans recognize now that the war we are engaging in, whether or not it was a mistake, will have serious consequences, that like it or not it has been a setback for some hopeful trends in international politics, ones we and others need for peace in the Middle East and elsewhere If we can face that possibility and talk about it soberly now, we may be better able after the war, without useless recrimination or gloating, to pick up the pieces and repair the damage, go back to promoting the rise of the trading state, the decline in the search for military solutions, and the quest for international consensus, legitimation, and legality

Notes

1 This essay contains many broad assertions like this with which other scholars may well disagree, I regret that both space and the nature of the essay forbid an attempt to to back them up with evidence

2 Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State* (New York, 1986)

3 This represents, much oversimplified, the thrust of John Mueller s *Retreat from Doomsday* (New York, 1989), a valuable if one-sided book

4 If one wants an analogy, Hitler is not the best, Saddam cannot compare with him in the scope of his ambition, the power he wielded, and the monstrosity of his ideals But Saddam does make a pretty good Arab Mussolini

5 I mean "just in the sense of being waged for a justifiable end, to remedy a genuine evil and prevent worse evils Whether the war will also be just in respect to the proportionality of means to ends and the avoidance of unnecessary harm to innocent parties is another question